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El Salvador: Controlling Rightwing Terrorism

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An Intelligence Assessment

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February 1985*

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [] Office of
African and Latin American Analysis. It was
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. []

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directed to the Chief, Middle America-Caribbean
Division, ALA, []

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**El Salvador:
Controlling Rightwing Terrorism**

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Key Judgments*Information available
as of 10 January 1985
was used in this report.*

Rightwing violence in El Salvador has declined significantly since the beginning of 1984. Figures supplied by the US Embassy put the total for confirmed political killings by both the left and the right throughout the year at 757—less than half the total for 1983 and only a fraction of the figure for the peak years 1980 and 1981. While statistics differ among observers, virtually all—including rebel supporters—confirm the sharply downward trend.

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The decline occurred despite partisan maneuvering during the spring 1984 presidential campaign and balloting, the coming to power of the moderate Christian Democrats led by President Duarte, and guerrilla planning for a major offensive. In our opinion, the reasons for the reduction include:

- Warnings from Washington, highlighted by the visit in December 1983 of Vice President Bush.
- Disciplinary measures by the military high command—such as transfers and discharges of enlisted men and officers involved in human rights abuses—to discourage such activities within the armed forces.
- Actions by the Duarte administration to reform the judicial system and to find legal means to make extremists more accountable for their activities.
- Self-imposed constraints by rightists themselves as they perceived the tactical and political trends undermining support for the insurgents.

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We believe President Duarte deserves high marks for his human rights initiatives and his ability to convince many armed forces leaders to cooperate with him in seeking new approaches to the leftist threat. Still, the President's successes in institutionalizing restraints on rightwing violence by means of judicial reform have been modest, and he may be approaching the limits of his ability to control extremist elements. For example, rightist political factions last summer emerged from legislative infighting to dominate judicial and legal appointments, complicating Duarte's efforts to pursue legal solutions. Further, the rightist-dominated Assembly passed a budget measure in December 1984 that would strip Duarte's judicial reform commission of all funding, as well as possibly frustrate his efforts to create a "criminological institute" to investigate rightwing terrorist acts.

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Faced with these and other reactions from the extreme right, Duarte has utilized ad hoc measures, such as personnel shifts in the armed forces, to prompt changes in the military's behavior, but he has probably come close to breaching the military's tolerance for some of his moves. The most notable example of this was in January 1985 when the President backed off—in the face of coup rumblings—from efforts to promote to general officer rank the moderate Vice Minister of Defense Lopez Nuila, a noncombat officer viewed by some commanders as too sympathetic to Christian Democratic politics. []

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We believe, moreover, that there will be growing incentives for some extremists to intensify violence soon. Of paramount interest to the right are:

- The legislative and municipal elections scheduled for March 1985, which will determine the balance of power between the far right and the moderates for the next three years.
- The Duarte government's handling of dialogue with the insurgents.
- The guerrillas' increasing use of urban terrorism, which invites similar tactics by the right. []

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We believe that these issues, together with continuing political and economic problems, are likely to generate increased terrorism by military and civilian extremists during 1985. []

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[] Since talks with the insurgents began in October 1984, President Duarte has been publicly sentenced to death by one rightist death squad. []

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Despite official efforts to discourage extremist activities, both the vehicles for and the rationales behind rightwing terror remain largely intact. []

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[] ultrarightist standard bearer Roberto D'Aubuisson and members of his Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) cooperate with and direct some terrorist groups. Although we perceive ARENA's internal terrorist network to be one component of the much broader phenomenon of rightist violence in El Salvador, the party's attitudes and goals probably influence extremist perspectives in general and, by extension, help determine the prospects for resurgent violence by less organized ad hoc groupings of both civilians and the military. []

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Although we judge that resurgent rightist violence probably would not exceed and may not reach the levels of 1983, a potential rise in the political death rate would work against US policy interests in El Salvador. An increase in violence—reversing the highly publicized downward trend of 1984—would be used by leftists in El Salvador and their propagandists abroad to discredit the Duarte government and generate public and official pressure in the United States to reduce its assistance to the country. In our view, just as was the case during Duarte's provisional 1980-82 term, opponents would use any rise in violence to discredit the President's political initiatives, making it more difficult for him to carry out such activities as the dialogue with the guerrillas.

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Moreover, in our judgment, the extremists' frustrations over their inability to undercut US support for moderate transition in El Salvador pose a growing threat to US officials in the country. This is especially true in light of Washington's support for President Duarte's peace initiative. Extremists have publicly charged US agencies and the Embassy with imposing a harmful reform process and with rigging Duarte's election victory in May 1984. We believe, therefore, that some rightwing fanatics may now be more willing to try to intimidate Washington directly by attacks against US personnel in order to weaken Christian Democratic policies.

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El Salvador: Controlling Rightwing Terrorism ☐

Introduction

Politically motivated civilian killings in El Salvador fell sharply in 1984 as the government took action on a variety of fronts to rein in death squads. That reduction, in conjunction with significant political and military developments, has aided democracy and the promise of an eventual resolution of the civil war. Recent death threats against President Duarte and other government officials over the issue of dialogue with the insurgent left, however, have underscored the truculence of powerful rightwing terrorist groups that in the past acted with virtual impunity. Some recent events, such as rumors of impeachment maneuvers against Duarte in the Assembly and coup plotting within the military, suggest that the President may be approaching the limits of his ability to constrain extremist violence. Moreover, the press of political, military, and socioeconomic issues may make Duarte's task more difficult over the coming year. ☐

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This assessment is a descriptive and analytic overview of the structure and goals of the Salvadoran extreme right and its terrorist capabilities. It reviews those factors that have contributed to a reduction in rightist terrorism, examines prospects for resurgent violence, and outlines the implications for US policy. ☐

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Legacy of Violence

Violence is part of the cultural history of El Salvador, just as it is in neighboring countries. Salvadorans are at once intensely nationalistic and community oriented, while also being fierce champions of personal gain. Highly ingrained in the national psyche are the interlocking values of ownership of property, loyalty to family and friends, and pride of the individual. The historical record shows that retribution can be swift against those who challenge such principles, and the practice of violent vendetta traditionally has been common among all socioeconomic classes and along

the entire political spectrum. Even during the comparatively peaceful and prosperous years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the relative level of common domestic violence—resulting from property feuds, spontaneous duels, and crimes of passion—was among the highest in the world, according to international statistical references. By the mid-1970s, homicide was the third leading cause of death in the country, as indicated by Salvadoran Government records. ☐

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Political violence, similarly, has occurred for generations. We believe that, before the Marxist insurgency. in 1979, such violence largely reflected the various military regimes' efforts to neutralize what were perceived to be subversive elements. During the past five years of insurgent war and transition toward democracy, the public record shows that thousands of noncombatants have disappeared or have been killed by unidentified persons and vaguely identified groups. President Duarte has publicly placed the death toll at over 40,000 and has primarily blamed rightwing death squads.¹ We agree that a large but unknowable percentage of the political violence in recent years has been carried out by rightwing civilian and military extremists. ☐

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¹ US Embassy statistics on civilian political deaths indicate that there have been just over 10,000 killings confirmed by civil authorities and the local media since January 1981. Many thousands more reportedly were killed during 1980, before records were systematically maintained. Unsubstantiated totals—which Catholic Church observers, the foreign media, and organizations supportive of the left have produced—often range from 40,000 to as high as 60,000. According to US Embassy investigations, part of this discrepancy is due to leftist-oriented church and human rights groups that have counted guerrilla battle casualties as civilian political killings attributable to the right wing. The insurgent left has contributed significantly to the total by carrying out over the past five years several thousand *ajusticiamientos* (justified executions). Guerrilla targets have included government personnel, supporters, and their families, as reflected in captured guerrilla documents and public admissions made by rebel spokesmen. ☐

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Evolution of the Extreme Right

Rightwing political violence had its genesis in El Salvador's late-19th-century conversion from mercantilism to capitalism. At that time the government confiscated peasant farmers' subsistence holdings and turned them over to large coffee growers in order to develop an agricultural export system. A semifeudal, social-Darwinian system soon evolved around landless wage-earning laborers, a tiny managerial aristocracy, and a constabulary army to maintain order.

By December 1931, however, the world depression had gutted the economy, and a newly elected civilian government was threatened by growing unrest. The Army staged a coup and established a military dictatorship. A month later, impoverished Indian laborers seeking return of their lands launched a small uprising in the western provinces.

the rebellion was fomented in part by Communist Party militants who were attempting to integrate rural workers with the fledgling socialist trade union movement in the capital. Fearing a widespread conspiracy, the Army and the civilian elites reacted by massacring as many as 30,000 peasants in a few weeks.

The resulting endemic national paranoia over the Communist threat reinforced authoritarian rule by the armed forces and its affluent civilian backers for the next half century. The chain of military regimes provided order and stability, and largely gave the plantation owners and monopolist businessmen a free hand over the economy. Combining with favorable international economic trends and foreign aid, this system of rule resulted in substantial material progress for the upper and middle classes, and development of a strong physical and institutional economic base. Given these historical roots, order and stability

also became closely identified with institutionalized violence against dissident leftist elements, as well as intimidation of the rural peasant and urban labor classes.

Control over society was handled by the military government and civilian elites largely through paramilitary constabulary forces, regular Army units, and numerous official and private vigilante organizations. The historical record shows that, given the inherent weaknesses of the formal judicial process, these security bodies would often function at the local level as judge, jury, and executioner of individuals perceived to be criminals or subversives.

The Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in July 1979 shocked Salvadoran military leaders and provided the catalyst for a reformist coup in October, as indicated by US Embassy reporting. Convinced that dramatic political, social, and economic changes were needed to deter a popular insurrection among the urban and rural poor during a period of economic downturn and leftist unrest, the new armed forces leadership formed a civil-military junta with the moderate Christian Democrats that was committed to democratic elections and socio-economic reforms.

perhaps 20 percent of the entire officer corps was subsequently purged, which, in part, had the effect of neutralizing many corrupt senior officers and their subordinates who had long ago been co-opted by rightist civilian elites. With the Army backing reform, the political and economic power of the oligarchy was quickly reduced, with many of its key members liquidating assets and opting for self-imposed exile in Guatemala and the United States.

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Structure and Operations of the Extreme Right

In our view, the violent attitudes and actions of the extreme right represent much more than just the conservative political spectrum. We believe that the extreme right is distinguishable from the mainstream right wing by two basic characteristics:

- Absolute intolerance of any element that has contributed to change in the pre-1979 status quo.
- Willingness to confront that change with active subversion of the constitutional system and with violent terrorism.

25X1 In our view, the extreme right does not predominate in any one social, economic, or political sector. Rather, it is a fanatic fringe drawn from all elements of society.

Indeed, despite a relative neutralization of the old order by the 1979 coup, we judge that El Salvador remains a decidedly conservative society, with rightist political tendencies running deep in the military, the private sector, and the general public. This was illustrated in the 6 May 1984 presidential election, which gave only a narrow margin of victory to Napoleon Duarte. Nearly half of the vote—in the largest and most honest election in the nation's history—went to the extreme rightist candidate, Roberto D'Aubuisson. Despite repeated public allegations of his terrorist links, D'Aubuisson won 10 of 14 departments and a majority of the rural vote over the progressive Duarte.

25X1 many Salvadorans perceived D'Aubuisson as representing a no-nonsense conservatism that would lend itself to reestablishing law and order and eradicating the insurgency.

25X1 Furthermore, in the absence of an effective criminal justice system and, until recently, an Army capable of containing the insurgency, the extreme right has been fighting what it considers a legitimate clandestine war against the left. According to US Embassy sources, rightwing extremists have viewed government reformers as national security threats equal to those posed by the guerrilla movement. Hence, rightwing violence—as reflected in overall levels of civilian political deaths—has generally increased as insurgent operations have escalated, when the battlefield performance of the armed forces has diminished, or when political and economic issues have been intensely debated in the Legislative Assembly.

The Public View of Rightwing Terrorism

The phenomenon of rightist violence, while publicly denounced by the leaders of virtually all sectors of Salvadoran society, evokes mixed feelings among average citizens in private discussion. While some talk about "death squads" only in hushed tones, others express detachment and even gallows humor over the disappearance or assassination of individuals. Occasionally, some will claim to have close friends on the right who allegedly engage in violence or who have personal knowledge of specific terrorist activities. Conversely, others choose to believe that rightwing terrorist groups do not exist.

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These contrasting attitudes are evident throughout society and reflect a great ambivalence about the national role played by rightwing terrorists. Many Salvadorans, of all economic classes, believe that, however repugnant the methods used by rightist vigilantes, their impact on Marxist subversion has been largely positive. Such people applaud government efforts to professionalize the armed forces and crack down on official corruption and abuses. At the same time, however, they denounce the US "obsession" with human rights and rationalize the need to fight leftwing terrorism with "whatever means are necessary." Often cited in such arguments is the official treatment meted out during the 1970s to the Tupamaros in Uruguay, the Montoneros in Argentina, and the Miristas in Chile, as examples of extraordinary measures sometimes needed to save a society from chaos.

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Against this backdrop, local criminals probably can continue to operate as mercenaries for hire to settle personal scores or fill the ranks of ad hoc death squads for fanatic rightists. Such an environment, moreover, will continue to make it difficult for San Salvador to investigate, prosecute, and convict local security force personnel who may still feel compelled to act on their own against suspected insurgents and their sympathizers.

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The rightwing extremist minorities of the various social sectors often wield enough power to influence events in ways disproportionate to their numbers. Important members of large agricultural, industrial, and commercial organizations are well-known rightwing zealots. US Embassy sources indicate, for example, that a number of wealthy Salvadoran expatriates living in Miami have lent both overt and covert financial and organizational support to paramilitary groups associated with coffee exporter Orlando De-Sola and others. Money and personal connections in El Salvador permit such individuals to aid or even participate in illegal activities in that country with relative freedom from prosecution because of their ability to bribe and intimidate Salvadoran Government and military officials. Accountability for extremist activities is constrained further because most of the Salvadoran media are privately owned by archconservatives, whose editorial policies include fierce criticism of even moderate government programs and praise for the hardline positions of the far right. A US Embassy informant with excellent access to rightwing groups has reported that some civilians are "untouchable," moreover, because of the power they wield through control of death squads. []

D'Aubuisson and ARENA

The creation of rightwing political parties over the years also has served the interests of the extremist minority in El Salvador. The most powerful of these groupings is the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). Founded in 1981 by Roberto D'Aubuisson—a former Army intelligence officer who was cashiered by the military following the 1979 coup—ARENA has evolved into the second-largest political party after the ruling Christian Democrats. Polls and election results show that it commands enthusiastic support from a broad spectrum of society and, as a multifaceted organization with important contacts among foreign governments and groups, it has helped legitimize extremist calls for retrenchment on reforms and eradication of the insurgent left through more radical use of force. []

According to US Embassy []

[] behind ARENA's legitimate exterior lies a terrorist network led by D'Aubuisson henchmen and funded by wealthy Salvadoran expatriates residing in Guatemala and the United States. According to the



ARENA party leader Roberto D'Aubuisson campaigning with his then wife Yolanda Mungia for the 1982 Assembly elections. []

Embassy, a body of evidence strongly implicates D'Aubuisson loyalists in the 1981 murder of two US labor advisers. Public confessions by the two National Guard triggermen and reports by eyewitnesses have connected various civilian and military associates of D'Aubuisson to the crime. A pro-ARENA Supreme Court judge has been successful in using legal maneuvers and personal influence to free Army Capt. Eduardo Avila from prosecution for the crime, according to US Embassy sources. One of these sources also reported that D'Aubuisson personally arranged for lower courts to drop charges against Lt. Isidro Lopez Sibrian, another junior officer implicated in the murders. []

In 1983, D'Aubuisson []

[] claimed that safeguarding human rights

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The D'Aubuisson Connection

Before leaving the armed forces in the wake of the October 1979 military coup, Maj. Roberto D'Aubuisson had served much of his career as an intelligence officer with the National Guard. He and several colleagues—graduates from the academy classes of 1963-64 and 1965-66—worked directly under or in cooperation with Gen. Jose "Chele" Medrano, former National Guard Director and a powerful figure in military and rightwing civilian circles. Medrano's proteges focused on counterintelligence and rural security, and, during the 1960s and 1970s, D'Aubuisson and his colleagues helped develop civilian intelligence networks and vigilante organizations controlled by the National Guard.

they also allegedly engaged in illegal detentions, torture, and the killing of prisoners—habits that some US and Salvadoran officials believe stayed with them after the 1979 reformist coup.

Among some of D'Aubuisson's most notorious associates in the security forces and the Army were Lieutenant Colonels Staben, Zacapa, Zepeda, Cruz, Ochoa, and Ponce, all of whom are now serving in top field and staff commands in El Salvador. These and other middle-grade officers were in turn the mentors of a new generation of junior officers who, have been involved in death squad and other illegal activities. The murder of two US labor advisers at the Sheraton Hotel in San Salvador in January 1981, for example, was authorized by two junior officers known for their criminal activities and close association with D'Aubuisson and other

extremist officers, according to US Embassy

In May 1980, D'Aubuisson was jailed and then exiled by the reformist junta for coup plotting. He left for Guatemala and, with some wealthy civilian associates, formed the Broad National Front (FAN), a semiclandestine political organization bent on overthrowing the reformist regime in San Salvador. At the time, FAN was receiving significant funding from a number of wealthy Salvadoran exiles living in Guatemala and the United States, and some FAN links with US politicians and businessmen. The FAN used black-market contacts to arm a small paramilitary organization in El Salvador that included both civilian and military personnel, some of whom probably belonged to existing death squads loyal to D'Aubuisson,

By the fall of 1981, D'Aubuisson had reorganized the FAN into a bona fide political party known as the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). He convinced businessmen, landowners, members of other rightist parties, and, a number of military officers to affiliate with ARENA and support candidates in the March 1982 Constituent Assembly elections. During that period, rightwing gunmen allied with ARENA killed several Christian Democratic Party members, civil servants, and labor figures, according to US Embassy sources.

was impossible in an insurgent war and advocated "extraofficial" operations to combat the enemy.

reported in April 1984 that Regalado was recruiting some 30 former policemen for work in death squads.

ARENA's clandestine activities appear to be largely the responsibility of party security chief Dr. Hector Regalado.

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Rural Vigilantes

Violence linked to ARENA is only one manifestation of rightwing terrorism in El Salvador. To eliminate challenges to its power, the extreme right traditionally has used civilian vigilante organizations, elements of the armed forces, and death squads led by ideologues and mercenaries, according to US Embassy [redacted]

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In the 1960s and 1970s, a surge of political activity among left-of-center opposition parties, peasants, urban workers, and student groups inspired the creation of several official and clandestine rightwing organizations, both ad hoc and permanent. The National Democratic Organization (ORDEN), for example, was a government-sponsored civic group formed in 1966 and comprising tens of thousands of conservative peasants, many of them former Army enlisted personnel who were part of the nation's inactive reserve force, according to the public record. Until its official dissolution in 1979, ORDEN served both as an intelligence-gathering body and instrument of enforcement against real or suspected enemies of the regime. [redacted]

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Although the limited evidence available to us suggests that such government-directed groups have been inactive for several years, vigilante violence—albeit declining, according to the US Embassy—has continued in the countryside. A US Embassy source claims that ORDEN's structure generally has remained intact, with many of its former members having joined the Territorial Service and Civil Defense Forces—Army-run militias that provide local security in outlying villages and tactical intelligence to the military. We believe these militias too often function without official authorization as peasant vigilantes. The abduction in late 1983 of nine agrarian reform workers from the town of San Pedro Masahuat in La Paz Department, and their subsequent torture and murder in the Zaragoza hamlet of La Libertad Department, was attributed by US Embassy sources to local Civil Defense personnel. So, too, was the 1982 massacre of peasant farmers in the La Florida hamlet of Santa Ana Department and killings of Christian Democratic party members in the jurisdictions of El Paisnal and Aguilares in San Salvador Department. [redacted]

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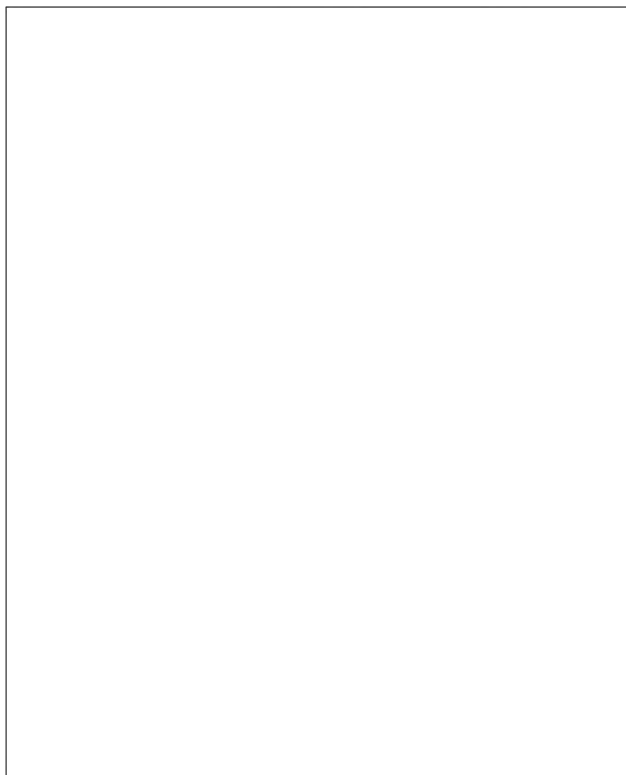
[redacted] a wealthy ARENA party member and close personal friend of D'Aubuisson owns a home that is used as a base for terrorist operations and to store weapons and ammunition. The house, located in a middle-class residential area of the capital, is said [redacted] to be used by members of the Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA), a rightwing terrorist group that past US Embassy reporting indicates has been ARENA's primary instrument for clandestine operations over the past three years. [redacted] the ESA has occupied a second house in the same neighborhood throughout most of 1984. [redacted]

[redacted] where a large cache of dynamite, time fuses, and blasting caps also is hidden. [redacted]

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Rural vigilantism is augmented in the towns and cities by civilian mercenaries and fanatics allied with specific individuals or groups who routinely have waged their own vendettas against suspected subversives and political enemies. For example, [redacted]

[redacted] was hired last year by rightwing paramilitary organizer and ARENA loyalist Mario Radaelli as a "hit man" in unspecified operations. Rightist terrorist cells also use both active-duty and retired military personnel in their campaigns, according to an Embassy informant in the security forces. [redacted]

Armed Forces Death Squads

In addition to ARENA and rural vigilantes, the military has also been responsible for a share of rightwing violence in El Salvador. Despite the now relatively moderate character of the military high command, the armed forces' staff and field commands are largely controlled by a younger generation of ambitious officers who have proved themselves to be among the best trained and motivated in a talent-deficient officer corps, [redacted]

[redacted] Unfortunately for the Duarte administration, many of these officers are former academy classmates and military colleagues of D'Aubuisson who share his ultrarightist views. Although they generally have abided by the moderate doctrine of their superiors in San Salvador, several, [redacted]

[redacted] are alleged to have associations with rightwing terrorist organizations and, in some cases, to have been leaders of death squads within the Army and the security forces. [redacted]

[redacted] death squads in the armed forces operate out of both urban military headquarters and rural outposts. They are led by senior enlisted personnel and junior officers, and they may function with or without the knowledge of immediate superiors. In 1983, for example, at least 20 and perhaps as many as 75 members of an Indian agrarian reform cooperative in the Las Hojas hamlet of Sonsonate Department were abducted and later executed by regular troops of the 6th Detachment, according to US Embassy and [redacted]

[redacted] These sources indicate that some military officers in Sonsonate were influenced by disgruntled landowners to take action against the Indians. Neither the leader of the operation, Capt. Salvador Figueroa Morales, nor his commanding officer, Lt. Col. Elmer Gonzalez Araujo, have been disciplined by their superiors. [redacted]

The November murder of a Lutheran minister in San Miguel Department illustrates that some actions are committed by regular military personnel without supervision. Spokesmen for the armed forces have announced publicly that two Army enlisted men from the 3rd Brigade confessed to killing the minister on a whim, apparently assuming he had links to insurgents in the area. [redacted]

Rightwing terrorists have been accustomed to operating with wide latitude, and it is almost certain that some Army and security force personnel continue to

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Two young girls become victims of a Salvadoran rightwing death squad. Their alleged offenses and the name of the group that killed them are probably inscribed on the pieces of paper attached to their wire-bound thumbs. [redacted]



cooperate with and participate in death squad activities. Past reporting from a variety of US Embassy [redacted] sources has indicated that the National Guard, National Police, and Treasury Police have all harbored terrorist elements within their ranks. In addition to the 6th Detachment in Sonsonate, other regular military units implicated, [redacted] in abductions and death squad activities include components of the Army Signal Corps, the Air Force, and the 1st Brigade, all three located in San Salvador; the Cavalry Regiment in San Andres; the Artillery Brigade in San Juan Opico; the Engineers Center in Zacatecoluca; the former 4th Infantry Detachment in Usulután; and the 2nd Brigade in Santa Ana. That several of these are key units with strong political sway within the military institution underscores the difficulty facing the high command in its efforts to improve the human rights record of the armed forces. [redacted]

Scope and Method of Operation

While we are certain of the broad sponsorship for rightwing terrorism by ARENA, rural vigilantes, and elements of the military, the precise scope and operations of terrorist groups is more difficult to assess. The methods used by the extreme right—such as interrogating or killing victims far from where they were abducted—suggest a nationwide capability within at least some of the clandestine organizations. Compartmentation, a rigid code of secrecy, and the shifting whims of extremist leaders make estimating the numbers of terrorist organizations and their members difficult. The geographic breadth and frequent simultaneity of rightist operations—as indicated by US Embassy reports of civilian political deaths around the country—suggest to us that as many as a dozen hit squads may exist in El Salvador during any given

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period of time. It is our judgment that most are nameless and largely ad hoc groups, keyed to specific missions in local areas. Some appear more permanently organized, however, and wider ranging. Perhaps the most notorious of these is the Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez Anti-Communist Brigade, named for the military dictator who carried out the 1932 peasant massacre. This group has operated for several years, frequently publicizing its abductions and executions of leftist student and labor leaders with notes attached to bodies, newspaper advertisements, and radiobroadcasts. []

US Embassy [] reporting indicates that such groups occasionally coordinate their activities with the security forces, and in some cases specific missions and personnel probably overlap different organizations. Perhaps the most outrageous instance of this occurred in November 1980, when masked gunmen abducted leftist political leaders during a news conference held in a Jesuit school near the US Embassy. Security for the affair was provided by a large number of uniformed National Police personnel, yet the abduction of six top leftists occurred in broad daylight without any interference from the authorities. The victims' mutilated bodies were found the following morning a few miles from the capital. []

Recent US Embassy reporting has indicated apparent working relationships among such clandestine terrorist organizations as the Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA), the National Salvation Movement (MS-28), and the Salvadoran Anti-Communist Commandos (CAS). Some US Embassy officials, moreover, believe that the Martinez Brigade and the ESA have a common leadership whose ultimate loyalties are to D'Aubuisson and his financial backers in Miami. []

Constraints on Rightwing Violence

Although the various rightwing terrorist groups remain active and appear organizationally intact, they are being utilized with far less frequency than in past years. Indeed, the level of rightist terrorism in 1984 was surprisingly low, given the stakes involved in the presidential elections, expectations of summer and fall

guerrilla offensives, and rule by the moderate Christian Democrats. New policies by the government and the military high command designed to present terrorists with a less hospitable climate have probably given pause to some extreme rightist elements. []

Changes in the Military

Following Vice President Bush's visit to El Salvador in late 1983, [] a new willingness among senior military officers to attempt to control rank-and-file extremists [] the high command would accept some US demands—such as transferring certain unsavory officers out of the country—because the armed forces badly needed US aid. Several Army and security force officers have since been sent overseas to diplomatic posts. [] Defense Minister Vides warned key ARENA security advisers—assigned by D'Aubuisson to manage security at the Legislative Assembly—that if they remained in El Salvador they would be investigated for their involvement in terrorist activities. One of these advisers, Dr. Hector Regalado, later told US Embassy officials that he resigned his public position as chief of security to avoid tarnishing ARENA's image during the spring election campaign. []

These actions came in the wake of arrests by the National Police of three other D'Aubuisson security operatives on kidnaping charges. Moreover, []

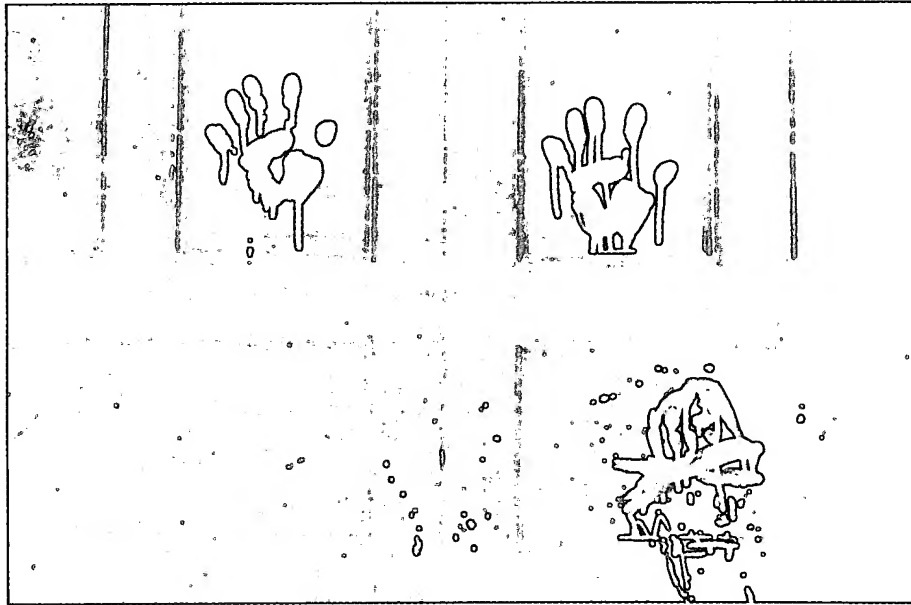
[] The callers threatened them with prosecution if they did not leave the country. The National Police at that time also arrested Army Capt. Eduardo Avila, implicated in the 1981 murder of two US labor advisers. Legal maneuvers by extreme rightist supporters, however, soon secured Avila's freedom, and all serious charges against him were dropped. []

[] the Defense Ministry believed there was growing willingness within the officer corps to investigate extremist elements. []

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The calling card of the Mano Blanca (white hand) rightwing death squad appears on the doors of a schoolhouse where assassinated members of a left-wing teacher's union were employed. ☐



Notices were placed in the local media announcing a campaign by the armed forces against the "death squads," and calling for help from the public and the justice system in identification and prosecution of the squads' members. One such notice was signed by most of the armed forces' staff and field commanders. In addition, the Ministry set up an ad hoc military commission at the beginning of 1984 to investigate reports of criminal activities and human rights abuses within the armed forces. ☐

Throughout 1984, moreover, the Defense Ministry—under orders from President Duarte—moved to exert greater control over the three security forces, according to the US Embassy and ☐ Political moderates were placed in charge of the National Police and Treasury Police, with the latter having undergone a major personnel reorganization that transferred or discharged some 110 officers and enlisted men from its notorious intelligence and investigations section. Colonel Lopez Nuila—staunchly critical of rightist violence—was appointed Vice Minister of Defense in charge of public security. This new position was created to better coordinate and control the activities of the two police organizations and the National Guard, according to the US Embassy. ☐

The present military leadership continues to recognize that US aid levels and the effective prosecution of the war rest in part on the Salvadoran armed forces' human rights performance, ☐

☐ As a result, such actions as the telephone warnings to civilians suspected of involvement with the death squads and a reiteration of strict guidelines for armed forces conduct are likely to continue. In our judgment, the close relationship between key military officers and extreme rightist civilian politicians—as indicated by US Embassy sources reporting on incipient coup plotting during the New Year holidays—provides an effective conduit for the military to constrain extreme rightist actions. ☐

Revamping the Justice System

Despite their preoccupation with establishing the credibility of the political process while escalating the war effort, both the provisional coalition government of President Magana and the successor Duarte administration pushed through judicial measures aimed at controlling the terrorist element. Early in 1984, a

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Rightwing Terrorist Organizations**Salvadoran Anti-Communist Command (CAS)**

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Created in late 1983. Largely engaged in propaganda. Publicly denounced Defense Ministry for imposing human rights doctrine on the security forces. US Embassy believes the group may only be front for other clandestine organizations. []

Death Squadron (EM)

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May not be an organized group but rather a generic label used loosely by ad hoc hit squads probably operating out of military posts. Trademark since at least 1979 has been initials EM carved into bodies of victims. []

Secret Anti-Communist Army (ESA)

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One of the most active groups in recent years. Believed [] to have been formed in mid-1980 by elements that since have been integrated into ARENA's paramilitary structure. []

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White Hand (MB)

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Like the EM and other nameless groups, a probable ad hoc name for terrorists working out of the Army and security forces. Trademark traditionally was a handprint in white paint left on the property of victims or near their bodies. []

Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez Anti-Communist Brigade (MHM)

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Responsible for many high-profile killings over the past five years. Victims often found clutching leaflets with the group's message on them. MHM has used newspapers, radio, and even television to make announcements of acts committed and operations planned. []

Salvation Movement of 28 March (MS-28)

Group first appeared on the scene in late 1983. Its propaganda and name—28 March 1980 was the last day of Phase I government expropriation of large plantations—suggest the group represents the interests of a tiny group of fanatic coffee barons, many of whom probably reside in Miami. []

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Organization for Liberation From Communism (OLC)

A group that appeared on the scene at about the time of the October 1979 coup; its current status is unknown. May have been absorbed by one or another of the above groups, possibly the ESA, which some US Embassy officials believe comprises personnel from former terrorist organizations such as the White Warriors Union and the Salvadoran Anti-Communist Brigade. []

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White Warriors Union (UGB)

Formed in May 1977 following the leftwing kidnapping and murder of Foreign Minister Mauricio Boronovo. The group was led by Roberto D'Aubuisson and other National Guard officers, [] and emphasized the assassination of Catholic priests perceived to be active supporters of the insurgent movement. The UGB appears to have been disbanded soon after the October 1979 coup and D'Aubuisson's release from active duty. []

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special investigations unit was created with US financial and technical aid to help the government analyze terrorist activities and bring to justice perpetrators of rightwing violence. The much-publicized case against five National Guard enlisted men charged with torturing and killing four US churchwomen in late 1980 was finally resolved. All five were convicted in May by a civilian jury and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Although an initial coverup of the affair probably was orchestrated by midlevel National Guard officers, there has never been any credible evidence that the killings of the churchwomen were ordered by higher authority. []

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Conservative women's group confronts visiting liberal US legislators in January 1983 with protest signs demanding that Salvadoran President Magana refuse to dialogue or negotiate with the rebels and calling Senator Dodd a "white rat."

Judicial proceedings against civilian and military personnel arrested for past terrorist acts also continue to progress, albeit unevenly. One setback in this effort was the Supreme Court's review of the case of Lt. Lopez Sibrian, which in November 1984 resulted in his acquittal of all charges stemming from the 1981 murders of two US labor advisers. As suggested by US Embassy reporting, however, US pressure recently helped Duarte in December to convince a reluctant military high command to have the lieutenant dropped from the list of active-duty officers. Moreover, Duarte's government in November warned local media owners of fines and other legal sanctions if they continued to publish or broadcast declarations from self-proclaimed rightwing terrorist organizations. After a two-month hiatus, however, extremist communiqués and death threats are once again being published.

The administration is now struggling with the rightist-dominated Legislative Assembly to create a judicial commission to oversee broad reforms proposed by Duarte for the civil and criminal justice system. According to the US Embassy, a recent Assembly bill would cut off funding to this and other presidential commissions, probably forcing Duarte to veto this legislation. These obstacles could also affect plans by the President to activate a "criminological institute" to investigate specific rightwing terrorist acts. US Embassy sources report that its first priorities would

include an investigation of the March 1980 assassination of Archbishop Romero, said by other US Embassy sources to have been authored by D'Aubuisson and his backers.

Self-Imposed Constraints

In addition to changes in the military and judicial systems, last year's reduction in rightist violence is also attributable, in our opinion, to a variety of self-imposed constraints. Some extreme rightists probably concluded that, in the wake of the visit by Vice President Bush in 1983, at least a temporary stand-down in terrorist activities would be required to direct the attention of the US administration away from the issue of human rights. Almost certainly, in our view, the US Congressional focus on political violence in El Salvador and the need for continued US military and economic aid provided extreme rightists additional incentives to curtail terrorist operations.

The right wing probably also has been encouraged by the upturn in government fortunes on the battlefield since January 1984 and a commensurate loss in political support for the rebel alliance. The far right may believe that favorable trends in the military situation have temporarily reduced the need for civilian terrorist operations against insurgent elements.

The election campaign last year ironically also played a role in reducing rightwing terrorism. It is our judgment that many rightist leaders genuinely believed that D'Aubuisson and his ARENA party could win the 1984 presidential elections. Hence, there was an incentive for extremists not to undermine their leader's public appeal with high-profile terrorist violence. Following the electoral defeat of ARENA, moreover, the party became less cohesive, according to US Embassy. Extremist elements, therefore, may have been preoccupied less with fomenting violence and more with sorting out their options in dealing with the new Duarte government and the scheduled Legislative Assembly and municipal elections in March 1985.

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***Some Prominent Cases of Rightwing Terrorism,
1980-84 (As reported by the US Embassy)***

Salvadoran Cases

- In December 1980, National Guardsmen killed eight members of a rural cooperative in San Vicente after they were denounced as subversives by the local Civil Defense. **Disposition:** The Guard commander who ordered the killings was transferred to another department. The military promised financial remuneration to families of the victims.
- In March 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated while performing Mass in a San Salvador chapel, presumably by right wing. **Disposition:** No government investigation or arrests.
- During 1981, atrocities occurred in two working-class neighborhoods of the capital. Some 40 suspected leftists were summarily executed by elements of the 1st Infantry Brigade and Treasury Police. **Disposition:** No investigations or arrests.
- During 1981-82, some 30 peasants from Sonsonate Department were abducted and killed by local Civil Defense forces and their bodies thrown into a well in the town of Armenia. **Disposition:** Government investigation recently begun; three suspects arrested.
- In November 1982, Army troops stationed in Usulután abducted at least 15 youths from nearby Santa Elena and murdered them. **Disposition:** No investigation or arrests.
- The same month, Army and Civil Defense personnel tortured and killed at least seven members of La Florida farm cooperative in Santa Ana Department. **Disposition:** No investigation or arrests, despite US Embassy representations.
- In February 1983, between 20 and 75 Indian farmworkers from Las Hojas jurisdiction of Sonsonate Department were abducted and killed by Army and Civil Defense troops commanded by Captain Figueroa Morales of the 6th Detachment. **Disposition:** Figueroa was transferred, and three Civil Defense suspects detained last May. No further information.
- In November 1983, Civil Defense forces tortured and murdered nine peasant men and women in Zaragoza hamlet in La Libertad Department. According to unsubstantiated reports, Army Lt. Col. Denis Moran—reputed death squad leader—ordered the killings. **Disposition:** No investigation and no arrests. Lieutenant Colonel Moran recently transferred to the Inter-American Defense School in Washington, D.C.
- In February 1984, seven Civil Defense members reportedly were on trial in Santa Ana for murders committed over a four-year period. **Disposition:** No information on the outcome.
- The April 1984 trial of notorious ex-Army Maj. Guillermo Roeder—arrested in 1982 for crimes ranging from embezzlement to murder—was considered a key test of the Salvadoran justice system. **Disposition:** Roeder was acquitted of all charges.
- In November 1984, a Salvadoran Lutheran minister was murdered by two Army personnel in San Miguel. **Disposition:** The perpetrators confessed and were remanded to civil authorities.

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Cases of US Citizens

- The murder of four US churchwomen in December 1980 was resolved in May 1984, when five National Guardsmen were convicted by a civilian jury and sentenced to 30 years in jail.
- The case of John Sullivan—a freelance journalist abducted and killed by presumed rightists in December 1980—is unlikely to ever be fully investigated by the government. US Embassy investigations have yielded no solid leads.
- The case of two US labor advisers assassinated in January 1981 remains tenuous. Two National Guard triggermen confessed in 1982, but two officers who ordered the killings and wealthy civilian conspirators have escaped prosecution in civilian courts. One of the officers was released from active duty in December under orders from President Duarte.

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The relative lack of political confrontation between Duarte and the right wing in 1984 probably also lent itself to reducing violence. Until the beginning of this year, Assembly debate had been low-key, as most of the earlier reform issues were resolved before the elections, thus removing opportunities for volatile political crusades by the extreme right opposition. Duarte, moreover, avoided public confrontations with extreme rightists and skillfully undercut them by assuaging military leaders on important decisions—including initial plans for dialogue with the insurgents. In addition, his trips abroad greatly boosted the country's international image, resulting in increased foreign aid and raising potential commercial opportunities for Salvadoran businessmen. [redacted]

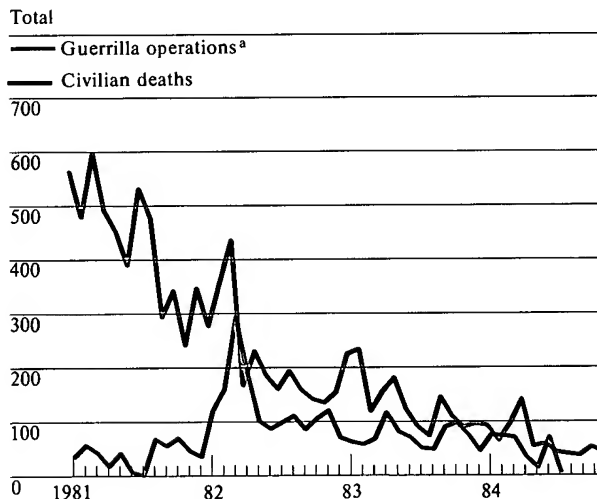
Potential for Renewed Violence

In our judgment, the level of rightist violence is likely to rise in 1985. Present political and military trends suggest the possibility for increased rightist violence in the near-to-middle term, despite the disincentives that brought the rate down in 1984. We believe the basic philosophy of the extreme rightists remains unchanged; they apparently continue to view the democratic transition as anathema to their interests and violent terrorism as an effective policy tool. At the time of Vice President Bush's visit in December 1983, a press communique by the extreme right clearly stated this basic philosophy when it announced the formation of a new political front, the National Liberation Party (PLN). The group's party doctrine called for "clandestine armed struggle as the only solution to the Central American crisis," and urged the Salvadoran citizenry to join in the right's clandestine war against the Communist forces. We believe the views of the extreme right remain unchanged in 1985. [redacted]

Rightist Attitudes and Goals

One factor that may induce rightwing extremists to escalate violence is their probable concern over recently increased guerrilla activities and their likely reaction to planned changes in guerrilla tactics. Although weakened on the battlefield, the guerrillas' continuing capabilities were underscored by a major Army defeat in December 1984 near the village of El Salto in La Paz Department. The insurgents have also

Figure 2
El Salvador: Civilian Political Deaths and Guerrilla Offensive Operations, 1981-84



^a Through July 1984 only.

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stepped up their sabotage of the economy country-wide—including attacks on agricultural targets in the heretofore quiet western departments—and appear to have begun a new campaign of urban terrorism. The various insurgent factions have been planning renewed political agitation and violence in the capital and other large cities, according to US Embassy [redacted] reporting. [redacted]

[redacted] Leftist union strikes have effectively shut down much of the country's external communications system, and guerrilla sabotage of the power grid since early January has forced government rationing of electricity in the capital. The insurgents are also intensifying their war of attrition against the government's urban security personnel, as well as planning additional assassinations of local political leaders and foreigners, [redacted]

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the guerrilla groups will soon be taking greater advantage of the more open political environment in El Salvador to challenge central authority further and damage the economy. Although, in our view, the government has shown great restraint in not responding to the initial rise in leftist-sponsored activity at yearend, the probable continuation of, or increase in, leftist-inspired public and private labor strikes and street demonstrations will only serve to incite extreme rightist elements.

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Politically, potential exists for more bitter clashes between Duarte and the right wing as the March legislative and municipal elections approach and as the Christian Democrats bring their political agenda to the forefront later in the year. Already, a confrontation in the Assembly, precipitated in December 1984 by a presidential veto of a rightist-sponsored electoral law, has pitted the moderate administration against the conservative opposition in what could have become a constitutional battle in the Supreme Court. This and other policy moves by the President likely have reinforced rightist fears about his political intentions. Duarte's perceived bid for extralegal powers, combined with recent rumblings of coup plotting within military circles, will likely encourage a rationalization among at least some extreme rightists that they must move violently against the Duarte administration.

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Another volatile issue that could precipitate a right-wing backlash is the dialogue between the government and the insurgents. Strong anti-Communist sentiments and inherent distrust of Duarte make the right wing particularly nervous about the President's ability to carry on a peace initiative without losing ground to the rebels, according to US Embassy sources. Although mainstream conservatives appear willing to support the principle of continued peace talks, these sources indicate that D'Aubuisson and other ultrarightist leaders are increasingly restive about what they perceive as an eventual sellout to the guerrillas by President Duarte.

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Reflecting their distaste for the negotiation process, ultrarightist leaders in the Assembly are already maneuvering to block an administration proposal for broad amnesty for the insurgents, as indicated by US



US Ambassador Robert White stands over the shallow grave in which four US churchwomen were buried following their torture and murder by members of the National Guard in La Paz Department, 2 December 1980.

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Embassy sources. These sources believe that any amnesty acceptable to the right wing would have to exclude top guerrilla leaders and include pardons for rightist criminals involved in death squad activities.

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ARENA will seek to block any amnesty plan proposed by Duarte with a counterproposal that would pardon all rightwing terrorists on an equal footing with leftist rebels. We suspect that such a proposal would include pardons for the five National Guardsmen already serving prison sentences for the killings of the American churchwomen, as well as those being investigated for the murders of other US citizens.

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In our judgment, Duarte is likely to reject such a counterproposal, although some of his own advisers might be inclined to accept a reciprocal compromise as necessary for reaching an accord on an amnesty. Should Duarte remain firm, however, rightist extremists may seek to supplant legitimate political debate with terrorist activities to scuttle the amnesty initiative altogether. Rightists may already be targeting government officials who are actively seeking a political end to the war. [REDACTED]

An upsurge in rightist violence would sorely test a judicial system that generally has failed to function even during the best of times. Despite the efforts by President Duarte to introduce legislation aimed at streamlining the judicial process and making it more effective, both the Attorney General's office and the Supreme Court remain overwhelmingly rightist in orientation. Moreover, unless the Christian Democrats can capture a majority of the Assembly seats in the March 1985 election or forge a working coalition with moderate rightists, the prospects for enacting any of Duarte's judicial reforms are poor. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A rightwing radio communique already has announced the "sentencing" of Duarte to death for his October meeting in La Palma with insurgent representatives. [REDACTED]

Increased rightwing violence and Duarte's inability to control it could cost the government some of its important political support from urban labor and peasant organizations, the church, and other moderate interest groups. Some Christian Democratic Party members might react to increased violence by dropping out of public service or political activity altogether, thus leaving the field more open to the conservative opposition. [REDACTED]

The extreme right also is concerned that it has lost influence over domestic issues and has publicly scored Duarte's social and economic policies. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the conservative business community despairs of Duarte's economic policies because it views them as having done nothing to alleviate socioeconomic decline while actually damaging the nation's potential for recovery. Duarte's perceived antagonism toward the private sector continues to undermine investor confidence in the government's willingness and ability to support business initiatives that would help regenerate economic growth. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As dissatisfaction grows within the business community, small groups of extremists may target labor leaders and Christian Democratic officials involved in the reform process or other economic planning as a way to demonstrate their displeasure and to intimidate the Duarte administration into adopting policies more favorable to large-scale private enterprise. [REDACTED]

Ramifications of Increased Violence

We judge that an increase in extreme rightist violence would complicate efforts by the Duarte administration to strengthen the country's moderate elements and its weak democratic institutions. While the level of violence probably would not exceed the levels of 1983—an average of 140 confirmed political killings per month—any rise in the rate of political deaths would reverse the significant downward trend in 1984 and make the government a more vulnerable target for criticism at home and abroad. [REDACTED]

The adverse international impact of resurgent political violence probably would offset some of Duarte's initial accomplishments overseas, which have included garnering broad political and financial support from governments and private groups. Significant new political and financial support from a variety of West European and Latin American countries to El Salvador is, according to the US Embassy, based largely on Duarte's progressive image, as well as public expectations that he will crack down on those responsible for political violence. Foreign adversaries of the government, as well as the insurgents' overseas propaganda network, would benefit from a Duarte presidency tarnished by rightwing violence. [REDACTED]

Duarte's ability to counter resurgent rightwing terrorism may be severely limited, in our opinion. Apart from the fact that judicial mechanisms are not yet in place to investigate and prosecute extremist groups, we doubt that military leaders—whether or not they are sympathetic to the goals of the ultraright—would allow a comprehensive purge of extremists from the ranks. Indeed, any move by Duarte to investigate and

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Political violence was a central issue during the 1982 Constituent Assembly elections. The government created this poster which reads: "This is the scene that we do not like to see. How sad! Thousands of lives extinguished by hate and violence. Your vote can make the difference. El Salvador deserves your vote." ☐

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prosecute members of the officer corps for political abuses or human rights violations would be strongly resisted by military leaders, probably compelling even moderate officers to side with their conservative colleagues against the civilian government. Such an institutional crisis would almost certainly result in renewed coup plotting among selected senior staff and combat commanders, pressured from below by a substantial portion of the junior officer corps. ☐

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Implications for the United States

We believe a resurgence of rightist violence would affect US policy, by:

- Giving the insurgents a highly exploitable propaganda issue that they would use to discredit the dialogue with the government and to justify their continuing refusal to participate in the democratic process.

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- Creating a situation conducive to mounting public and official pressure in the United States for a reduction or cutoff of assistance to El Salvador.

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- Complicating any efforts by Washington to generate international financial and diplomatic support for the Duarte government.

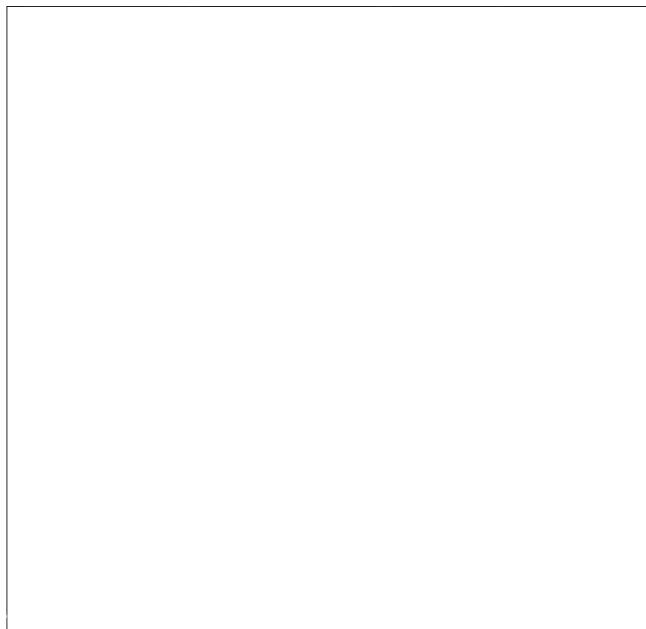
Beyond these policy considerations, it is our judgment that the frustration of the extreme right over its past inability to undercut US support for moderate transition in El Salvador poses a growing threat to US officials in country. Extremists publicly charge the US Agency for International Development with having imposed an allegedly harmful reform process on the country, the US Congress with financial and political constraints on the Salvadoran war effort, and the US Embassy with rigging the May 1984 presidential elections in favor of the Christian Democrats.

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We believe that threats from the right against US personnel are especially serious in light of Washington's support for President Duarte's peace initiative. As the dialogue with the guerrillas progresses, the armed forces and the private sector may increasingly fear that Duarte risks being politically outflanked by the rebels in future peace talks or, worse, militarily strapped by an unfavorable cease-fire arrangement. Some rightwing fanatics may now be more willing to try to intimidate Washington directly by attacks against US personnel in order to weaken Christian Democratic policies.

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